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WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF THE SYSTEM OF ACCREDITING SCHOOLS BY THE UNIVERSITIES UPON THE HIGH SCHOOL AND ITS DEVELOPMENT?¹

It is assumed in the following discussion that a system of accrediting schools implies visitation and inspection of these schools either by an official whose main business it is to examine them, or by some member or members of a university faculty specially detailed for the purpose. It is not assumed that every accredited school must be inspected by a representative of every college or university with which it stands in the accredited relationship. One inspector may serve for many institutions; but inspection and report by some authority there must be. What a system of accredited schools without such inspection might accomplish the writer has no desire to suggest.

Before taking up the main question of the paper, that is, the effect of the system of accrediting schools by the universities upon the high school and its development, it may be well to ask concerning the purpose or purposes of the university in inspecting and accrediting a school. The answer clearly is that, just as the individual applicant for admission to the university is subjected to a more or less rigid examination, under the examination system, to determine whether he has met the admission requirements and is qualified to undertake the university course successfully, so, under the inspection system, the school is examined to see whether it is doing work in amount, kind, and quality such that its graduates, and those bearing proper credentials from it, can be safely assumed to be prepared to enter upon the university course successfully. And just as the student who has satisfactorily passed the entrance examination is given a certificate of admission to the university, so the school whose work has been judged satisfactory under inspection is recog-

¹The writer of this paper has been inspector of schools for the State University of Iowa for two years, and the statements made in the paper are based largely upon his observations during that period.

nized as maintaining an accredited relationship with the university. The primary purpose in either case is to determine the fitness of the student to take up university work, the only difference being that in one case the individual, and in the other case the school, is examined and admitted to organic relationship with the college. The fundamental interest of the university in the high school lies in the fact that the latter is, in the main, the source of supply for the student material of the former, and some means must be used to determine officially the amount and kind of preparation possessed by these students. There is not necessarily any interest on the part of the university in the high school considered as an institution existing on its own account. Historically and logically, the first interest of the university in the high school arises from the fact that the latter is a *preparatory* school. That the high school does actually improve under the examination system or under the inspection system is a more or less incidental effect.

But under the inspection system this incidental effect rises to so great prominence as to be worthy of mention as a second definite purpose of the university in adopting the accrediting system and providing for the work of inspection. Educational reform proceeds from the top downward, and the university, by carrying into its preparatory schools the influence of its broader view-point, seeks to improve these schools, not only as preparatory schools, but as institutions which have obligations to that larger part of their constituency that never goes to college. The private university plans to this end in laying out the work of its system of accredited private schools, and the state university plans similarly in its suggestions to the public high schools of the state.

Intimately connected with the foregoing purpose may be mentioned that of the formation of an organic system of schools so arranged that each part will influence every other part, and mutual improvement be the result. The university is to be influenced by the high school, as well as the high school by the university. The way from the kindergarten through the university is to be made as easy as the serious nature of the work will

permit, and at every point in the course the pupil is to be stimulated by the view of that which is just ahead.

A fourth purpose of the university in supporting the accrediting system lies in the fact that the work of visitation of high schools by members of the university faculty gives these university teachers a direct knowledge of the secondary-school work that is of great value to them in their own teaching. The University of Michigan, the pioneer in the accrediting system as in so many other things, maintained the plan for twenty-five years before a regular school inspector was appointed, the work of visitation having been done during that period by members of the university faculty in turn; and I have been informed that President Angell regarded this reflex influence as one of the best results of the system.

A fifth purpose may be given as the desire of the university to secure students through the influence of its representative in the school and the community.

These, then, may be given as the main purposes of the university in adopting the accrediting system, namely: the determination of the fitness of a student to enter upon university work; the improvement of the high school, not only as a preparatory school, but as an educational institution existing on its own account; the formation of a unified system of schools; the better adaptation of university teaching as a result of the knowledge of secondary-school work gained through school visitation by members of the university faculty; and the securing of students through the influence of a university representative in the schools.

We turn now to the question of the effect of the system upon the high school and its development.

That the schools actually do improve under the influence of the university, exerted principally through its inspector, no one who has observed the workings of the system will be disposed to deny. In determining the extent and rapidity of the improvement, much depends upon the authority with which the inspector is clothed. In some states he can say: "Do this, or your school will lose its place on the accredited list," which means to lose

the state appropriation of \$600 to \$1,000 annually. In such a case a suggestion must be practically equivalent to a command. In Iowa the inspector's relation to the schools is little more than advisory. The most that he can say is that, if your school is to secure or maintain accredited relations with the state university and the colleges of the state, it will be expected to meet such and such conditions. The only penalty in case of refusal is that the school is taken from the accredited list. However, this is an unpleasant experience both for the school and for the man who is responsible for its condition at the time it is deposed. In general, it may be said, then, that the inspector has great influence in determining the character of the school.

So far as the effect of the system upon the high school is concerned, it is an open question which is better—the absolute authority of the inspector, as for example in Minnesota, or the more nearly advisory relation which exists in Iowa. Certainly the former method will accomplish results in much less time, but the latter has the advantage of encouraging a certain spontaneity and independence on the part of the high school at the same time that the other desired ends are secured. This spirit of independent co-operation is a very desirable result. The writer has rarely found himself wishing for more authority than he has.

Were the inspector to insist upon making the high school a mere preparatory school, he would not be well received. Prejudice against him sometimes exists on this account, but when school authorities understand that he is working for the good of the school as a whole, and not merely for that part of its students who expect to go to college, the prejudice disappears and his suggestions are made welcome. In Iowa this important preliminary work had been largely accomplished before the present inspector entered upon the work, and now schools are exceedingly desirous of securing and maintaining good standing with the university and the colleges.

The effect of the accrediting system upon the high school is manifested in different ways. In the first place, since the primary interest of the university in the school lies in the fact that the students of the latter must be received by the former, it follows

that the first effort of the university will be to inspire the school to meet entrance requirements. The elements of these requirements are to be found in the amount, kind, and quality of work done; in the number, scholarship, and efficiency of the teachers; in buildings; in library and laboratory facilities; in the length of the recitation period; in the number of daily recitations required of each teacher; and in the general atmosphere of the school. But the school cannot improve in these particulars without offering better opportunities to all pupils, whether they go to college or not. Hence, unless it happens that, in becoming a better preparatory school, the high school loses its efficiency considered as an institution of worth on its own account, it follows that, with the improvement of the school incident to its becoming accredited, there come larger and better opportunities to all the members of the school, regardless of their future career.

Just at this point we may raise more definitely the question whether the insistence of the university that accredited schools must prepare students for college does not necessarily turn aside the school from a free development as the school of the people. For answer I may say that in Iowa we frankly assume that the high school is not primarily a preparatory school; that it belongs to the people; that it has a work to do, regardless of the existence of the college; and that, if it prepares boys and girls for college, it is only because such preparation is a service to the people. In the case of schools that offer but one four-year course of study, we do not insist upon the maximum amount of work in those subjects, which are usually regarded as preparatory subjects, in contrast with practical subjects. This remark applies especially to Latin. If the community sentiment opposes Latin, but will support strong, thorough work in other subjects, we insist upon only two years of Latin—the minimum amount required for admission to the scientific and engineering courses of the university—and we give a hearty Godspeed to the development of the work in the so-called more practical subjects. In the case of schools that offer two courses of study, we ask that one shall contain four years of foreign language, but we encourage making the other as irregular as may be necessary to meet the

practical sentiment of the community, at the same time making it as strong as possible. Usually the subjects are the same in both courses, except that in the second course an option with Latin through the four years is offered. Consequently, with the improvement of the Latin or college-preparatory course comes the improvement of at least three-fourths of the work in the non-preparatory course. The emphasis of criticism is usually placed upon the lack of *thoroughness* in the work below the high school as well as in it. Hence, whatever influence the university has is exerted for the benefit of the entire school.

The presence of the inspector in the school has a stimulating influence upon the entire community. He is often asked to address the students, or to talk with them privately and it is not mere sentiment to say that the opportunity to inspire and stimulate his listeners is scarcely equaled in any other position. He is asked to talk with teachers individually or collectively, and to offer criticisms and suggestions concerning their work. These conferences afford an opportunity for encouraging words as well as for frank adverse criticism, and they result in a better mutual understanding of the difficulties to be encountered and the work to be done. He is invited to meet school boards, and sometimes to give a public address to the patrons of the school. All these occasions offer the University, through its inspector, an opportunity to direct and to stimulate the educational work of the high-school community.

The Iowa schools have been largely influenced in the past two years by bulletins published from time to time by the university. One of these contained suggestions and directions for small high schools having but two teachers and a three-year course of study. A second dealt with the course of study for the four-year high school. A third had to do with the work in English throughout the four years. These bulletins were partly a statement of university requirements and partly advisory in character. Reports from the schools show that they have had great influence in determining the high-school course of study. Much greater unity and a considerable degree of uniformity in the courses are now apparent.

The actual results of the work of the inspector are well illustrated by a few concrete instances. About two years ago the writer visited two schools on successive days. The first one was miserably housed. About \$2,000 had been spent the previous year patching up an old building that should have been torn down. At the request of the superintendent, the inspector called upon the members of the school board at their places of business. He spoke well of the spirit of the school and its possibilities, but he took occasion to condemn the school building in very vigorous terms. The board insisted that taxes were already too heavy and that the old building must do. But today there stands on the old site a substantial modern eight-room building costing \$22,000. The following day he visited another school, little better housed and not so well equipped. Again he and the superintendent called upon the individual members of the school board. They were very unresponsive when he spoke of the needs of the school. The inspector regarded the case as well-nigh hopeless, and was sorry he had not passed by on the other side. But before the beginning of the next year's work there had been added to the school a special teacher in the grades, an additional teacher, a college graduate, in the high school, and \$600 worth of books and laboratory supplies. The course of study had been revised so that graduates from the school could enter the university without condition. The inspector does not claim all the credit for accomplishing these ends. Without the work of an energetic superintendent they would have been impossible. But without the inspector's help they would not have been accomplished so soon.

Last year a certain school was taken from the accredited list. After his visit the inspector learned that his criticisms had not been kindly received by the one member of the school board with whom he had talked freely. But this year there is a new superintendent and new teachers, and, at the request of the board, the inspector has been consulted several times with regard to the reorganization of the school.

The inspector is often called upon to recommend teachers, and it is a pleasure to assist the worthy ones in securing more

agreeable and lucrative positions. No small influence is exerted in this way.

In general, it is true that at the suggestion of the inspector old buildings have been repaired or new ones erected, the course of study has been revised, books for the library and apparatus for the laboratory have been purchased, and an inefficient teacher or superintendent has been dismissed, or an additional teacher has been employed. Sometimes these changes have been made because the authorities have understood that such changes were necessary, if the school was to maintain its place on the accredited list, but more often they have been brought about because the superintendent and the board have seen them to be necessary for the proper progress of the school. Not unfrequently the inspector is invited and urged to visit a school to help in securing some needed improvement, or to assist in rousing the educational spirit of the community. In a very important sense, this is the most pleasant work he is called upon to perform. His distinctly judicial duties are not always so agreeable. He tries to deal justly and to speak frankly, at the same time loving mercy, especially when it is directed toward the children.

At present no particular effort is being made to increase the number of accredited schools. A higher standard of efficiency among those already enrolled is the main concern. But there is no lack of applicants, and school boards are in many cases willing to put forth strenuous efforts in order to meet the requirements.

In dealing with accredited schools, or those desiring to be accredited, the welfare of the school as a whole, rather than special university interests, are emphasized. If the former is properly safeguarded, the latter will take care of themselves. The bulletins previously mentioned were sent to many small unaccredited schools and there is evidence that these, too, have felt the influence of the call for greater thoroughness in the work, and are responding to it.

When to the influence of the official inspector there can be added the help that comes from the occasional presence and the sympathetic criticism of the university department representatives

in the high school, the beneficent results already mentioned must be greatly increased. The regular inspector can best look after the general conditions of the school, but the department representative can render greater service so far as stimulating the work of his own department is concerned. The University of Iowa is this year using both means of service, and the experiment promises well.

The schools themselves are not slack in their appreciation of the service rendered by the university in sending its representatives among them. When his mission has been understood, the writer has invariably received courteous treatment. In most cases a generous and, he believes, a genuine hospitality has been extended, and he has been invited to come again and often. Letters have followed him home telling of good results from his visit. There has not always been agreement with his views, but in case of disagreement there has been fair and frank discussion; and that is, perhaps, better. Complaint has frequently been made that the schools cannot meet the university entrance requirements, and occasionally one threatens to give up the attempt. But it never does. In such cases it can usually be shown that, if certain changes are made which would benefit the school as a whole, the requirements can be met; so that here again the university influence is broadly beneficent in its character. Generally speaking, it seems fair to say that the school men recognize the accredited relationship as a pull from above, inspiring pupils, teachers, school officials, and patrons to greater and more intelligent educational activity.

JOHN FRANKLIN BROWN.

STATE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA,
Iowa City.

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